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STATE OF WASHINGTON

DEPARTMENT OF GAME

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CONTROLLING NUISANCE COYOTES

If you thought you saw a coyote in metropolitan Seattle, you might be right! Coyotes do occur in urban areas of this state. They are intelligent creatures that have adapted readily to cohabitation with humans. In most situations they are beneficial by ridding us of unwanted rodents. However, their opportunistic feeding habits can bring them in conflict with people.

Coyotes are a member of the canine family and native to the Pacific Northwest. Their numbers and range have actually increased with the development of the state, and in urban areas they use greenbelts as their living space. Coyotes are about the size of a small German shepherd and are dog-like in appearance. They are grey to reddish-brown in color, with erect ears, a long slender nose, short bushy tail, and tall, thin legs. They hunt in small family units, with up to six in a pack, during the early pup-raising period of June through July. During the rest of the year they travel alone or in pairs.

Mating takes place in January or February, with up to ten young born in April or May. The male usually feeds the female during the late stages of her pregnancy and the first few weeks after the pups are born. The pups' eyes open in the second week of life. They then spend the next six to eight weeks playing around the den site. The den can consist of a hole in a bank, a culvert, or a chamber under a building or up-rooted trees. The den site can be identified by bone and feather debris and a well-worn area around the den opening. The family may use more than one den site in a season. After approximately two months, the pups begin to join their parents on hunts.

Normally coyotes are omnivorous, eating a variety of animal and plant foods. When available, meat forms the largest part of their diet, especially that of rodents and rabbits. Generally coyotes hunt along forest edges and meadows where rodents can be found.

Coyotes are opportunistic feeders and eat whatever is available. If domestic prey is readily accessible, coyotes will sometimes risk exposure for this easy meal. Leaving your cat out at night, you poultry unpenned, and pet-food, garbage, or compost uncovered, all may create a coyote smorgasbord!

Here are a few ways to discourage coyotes from becoming a nuisance:

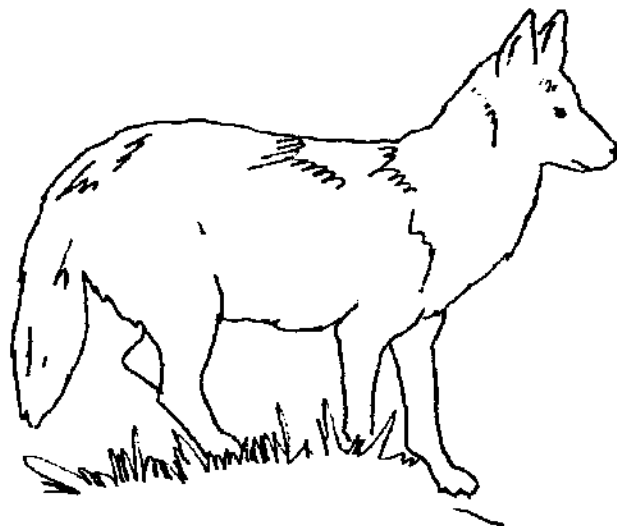
- 1) Confine your poultry in a pen at least four feet high using small wire mesh, such as chicken wire. The wire must be stretched tightly between posts and should be buried or secured to the ground. An additional precaution includes an electric wire outside and around the bottom of the fence.

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- 2) Protect your housecats by keeping them in at night. Barn cats need an escape route such as a fenced-in yard or "kitty-door" to the barn.
- 3) Pet food, garbage, and compost not only attract rodents, but coyotes as well. Pet food should be left inside at night, and garbage and compost should be securely contained.
- 4) Dogs left free to roam not only destroy and harass wildlife, but they can fall prey to coyotes. Even a large dog is no match for several coyotes. Keep your dogs under your control.
- 5) Livestock can be protected by using a small mesh woven-wire fence, such as welded 2" x 4" or sheep wire, in conjunction with electric wire. An effective coyote-proof fence can be made by alternating hot and cold electric wire.
- 6) Coyotes have not been aggressive towards people in this state. However, any wild animal will protect itself or its young. You need not fear them, but respect their capabilities. They can be discouraged from using the immediate areas around your house if you keep weeds and brush cut back.

Coyotes are more numerous now than when the first settlers arrived in America. They are effective predators and benefit us by controlling rodent populations. Because of their cleverness and adaptability, they can become a problem around residences in urbanizing areas. Trapping and removing some coyotes from the population is only a short-term solution. If food is still available, another coyote will probably replace the one removed. By doing your part to protect your property, man and coyotes can coexist.



NEWS RELEASE

WASHINGTON DEPARTMENT OF WILDLIFE

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CATS AND COYOTES

Eat or be eaten. This basic natural law applies even when the "nature" is smack in the middle of a King County suburb.

Domestic cats, long known to be a major predator of wild birds, appear to be moving down one link in the food chain.

University of Washington Researcher Timothy Quinn has found cat fur in about 60 of the 300 coyote scat (droppings) samples he has so far analyzed in his study of urban coyotes. Quinn has 800 more samples to go, but he's seen enough to be convinced that some urban coyotes do eat cats.

Cat-eating coyotes have been part of urban mythology for years, but Quinn's study, sponsored by the Washington Department of Wildlife, is the first attempt to collect hard data on the habits of Seattle's coyote population.

"More coyotes eat apples than cats, but we're finding greater evidence than we expected," said Quinn. "It looks as though cats that run loose, especially at night during the summer, are fair game."

The most potentially dangerous period for cats, says Quinn, is between June and August when adult coyotes are consumed with the task of feeding growing pups.

"There's an average of one cat per three households in Seattle," he said. "They provide a convenient prey base, sort of like rabbits do in rural areas."

Dogs are less likely to be coyote quarry because of their relative size and because dogs are more often supervised by their owners. The worst thing people can do with dogs, says Quinn, is to tie them up and let them bark. "A dog yipping in a high-pitched frantic tone is like a lunch invitation to a predator."

Department of Wildlife officials agree with Quinn's opinion that coyotes don't pose a threat to humans. The department has never confirmed an attack on a human by a coyote in the wild. And in his research, Quinn has discovered only 10 reported human/coyote incidents. Of those, none resulted in death, none were in Washington, and all involved coyotes living in national parks where they were being routinely fed by tourists.

Coyotes occur in nearly all the United States, Canada and Mexico. In Seattle, Quinn is finding coyotes "just about everywhere," especially in greenbelts skirting suburban neighborhoods and along creeks and streams. He even verified a family of coyotes in an area of north Seattle that was recently converted from 70 acres of grassy fields into a housing development.



The public's attitude toward urban coyotes — as toward urban wildlife in general — is mixed. One application to the Department of Wildlife's Backyard Sanctuary Program had a note in the margin that a coyote had just made off with the applicant's pet. She was still interested in improving her backyard habitat. Other people follow "their" coyotes through the seasons at golf courses and along railroad rights of way.

At the other extreme, Quinn and other wildlife employees receive calls from citizens demanding coyotes be eliminated from their neighborhoods.

"One man wanted to arm the militia and take them all out," Quinn related.

Coyotes are nearly impossible to live trap, and shooting or leg-hold traps are against city and county ordinances. Besides, says Quinn, removing coyotes is not a realistic approach. "Take one animal out — whether it's a coyote, raccoon or squirrel — and another one moves in behind it."

WDW Urban Biologist Steve Penland concurs, saying that all available urban habitat is at its carrying capacity, meaning if a scrap of woods has enough food, water and cover to support one coyote, five squirrels and a raccoon, that's what you're likely to find there.

The best long-term solution lies in a little human behavior modification, not in some complicated wildlife trap or repellent.

If all food sources are removed, animals will move on in search of better pickings. Quinn is finding that fruits and berries make up a large portion of the coyote's diet, so keeping ripe fruit picked up off the ground is important. Tightly covering garbage and food compost bins is also important. Avoid feeding pets outdoors and only allow pets out under supervision.

A sustained neighborhood-wide effort is required to be really effective. One family will be vigilant in keeping their cat indoors or in feeding the dog inside for a week, but will give in after the cat meows all night or the dog slobbers on the floor. If all households are going through the same thing, there may be cats or dogfood attracting coyotes at any given time.

If neighborhood action is out of the question, fencing is one alternative for protecting one's own yard. Even an open board fence will deter coyotes because of their aversion to being enclosed.

Quinn hopes to have his study completed by December 1991. At that time, he will present the Department of Wildlife with a set of management recommendations. Not on managing coyotes, he says — that's almost a contradiction in terms — but on managing and minimizing the conflicts that living with them can sometimes bring.

—Susan Ewing, Information Specialist
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Study focuses on urban coyotes

SEATTLE -- Urbanization may be chasing coyotes out of Seattle, but greenbelts next to new suburban housing tracts may provide the wily creature with other places to live and breed.

That's a conclusion of a recently completed study focusing on coyotes in urban areas, specifically Seattle, where recent sightings of the animals have caught the attention of a neighborhood.

The study was undertaken by Timothy Quinn as part of his doctoral studies at the University of Washington's College of Forest Resources. It was funded in part by the Washington Department of Wildlife.

Recently, coyotes have been seen in the Magnolia area of Seattle. The sightings have caused some residents there to express concern over the safety of their house cats. Coyotes sometimes prey on cats.

The coyotes are believed to have hailed from Discovery Park, a large undeveloped park in Magnolia that is home to a variety of wildlife, including bald eagles. Quinn's study notes that in the spring, 1992, the park was apparently colonized by a single pair of coyotes which subsequently gave birth to a litter of pups.

But anecdotal evidence collected by Quinn suggests that coyotes may be becoming rarer in the city. The decrease may be related to that fact that once vacant forested land where coyotes could live is disappearing, and existing coyote habitat is becoming isolated from the surrounding countryside.

"Although coyotes do whelp pups in Seattle, I believe that the persistence of coyotes in the city requires a continual influx of coyotes from more rural populations outside the city," Quinn writes.

Most of coyotes in Seattle are in Carkeek Park, which is connected by railroad right-of-way to rural areas north of the city, according to Quinn.

"The diet of coyotes in this area include small amounts of deer and cow, both of which are found only in areas well north of the city limits. This

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suggests coyotes are moving in and out of the city."

Quinn, who used satellite technology to plot the movements of coyotes in various vegetation throughout King County, writes that the ever-adaptable coyote will probably always thrive on the outskirts of Seattle and other cities. And greenbelts established for new housing developments may provide new homes for coyotes, particularly if the greenbelts are connected to rural areas, he writes.

"Some level of development probably favors the coyote by creating a variety of habitats and increasing the amount of potential food sources, including those that are human derived," Quinn writes. "Thus coyotes may be increasing in new housing developments along the urban/rural interface."

The urban coyotes studied by Quinn commonly ate food found in yards, including dog food, garbage and fruit. Apples represented the single most important fruit item in the coyotes' diet.

The study noted that homeowners should make an effort to remove potential food sources from their yards, and should not allow their small pets to roam free, particularly at night.

Also, people should never purposely feed coyotes, according to the study. Such feeding may help sustain coyotes populations at higher levels than can be supported by the environment. That could result in coyotes losing their fear of humans.

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